DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 341 983 CS 213 139

TITLE Parents Ask about Language Learning. A Booklet of Questions and Answers. A Joint Project.

INSTITUTION Alberta Dept. of Education, Edmonton. Curriculum Branch.; Alberta Univ., Edmonton. Dept. of Elementary Education.

PUB DATE Dec 91

NOTE 29p.

PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; Foreign Countries; *Language Acquisition; *Parent Participation; Parent Role; Parent School Relationship; *Parent Student Relationship

IDENTIFIERS Alberta; *Emergent Literacy

ABSTRACT

Intended to respond to parents' questions relating to their children's language learning, this booklet discusses questions organized around three themes: (1) Learning the Basics; (2) Marking Testing and Reporting; and (3) Helping Children at Home. The first section, on basics, addresses such questions as: "When will my child learn to read?"; "How important is phonics in children's reading?"; "Why are spelling, punctuation, and grammar left uncorrected in some of my child's writing?"; and "How do children get on with their own work if they spend a lot of time working in groups?" The second section responds to the comment: "My son's teacher tells me that marks don't give a complete picture of how a student is doing" and takes up such questions as "How can I know if my child is reading and writing at the right level?" and "will my child be ready for junior high?" Finally, questions in the section on helping children at home include: "I want to work with my child but I'm not sure how to do it"; "What can I do to help my daughter with her writing?"; and "What are some fun things we can do with our children to help them with their school work?"). The booklet's conclusion addresses briefly the six language learning principles on which its responses are based. A 13-item reading list is attached. (SR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

CS

ALBERTA EDUCATION LIBRARY
4th FLOOR
11160 JASPER AVENUE
EDMONTON, ALBERTA T5K 0L2

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Wolodko
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED341983

PARENTS ASK ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING

a booklet of questions and answers

a joint project of
Alberta Education and the University of Alberta

CS213139

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

December 1991

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This parent booklet has been produced through the cooperative efforts of many. The contribution of each person or group is sincerely appreciated and is acknowledged as follows:

- The agencies and support groups that provided access to parental viewpoints:

  City of Edmonton Children's Services
  Edmonton Catholic School Board Continuing Education
  Edmonton Public School Board – Parent Advisory Councils
  Family Life Education Council
  Norwood Community Centre
  Parents Involved as Partners in Education (P.I.P.E.)
  Parent Place, St. Albert
  Unity House

- The many parents who gave their time and shared their questions, concerns and viewpoints to provide the framework for the development of the booklet.

- The parents who gave continual support and feedback during the initial development:

  Jane Buchan
  Ardis Eliason
  Julie Fisher
  Roberta Humble
  Germaine McInnes
  Laura Nebo
  Laurie Skinner

- The staff and students of the Edmonton school of LaPerle Elementary, for supplying examples of children's writing.

- The teachers, principals, administrators and consultants in Alberta who provided information and viewpoints.

This booklet is a combined project of the University of Alberta and Alberta Education.

- University of Alberta, Department of Elementary Education
  Faculty Chairman: Bob Jackson
  Faculty Advisor: Moira Juliebō
  Parent Booklet Developer: Donna O'Neil

- Alberta Education, Curriculum Branch.
  Director: Lloyd Symyrozum

  ECS/Elementary Unit:
  Susan Lynch (Assistant Director)
  Lynn Bryan
  Jennifer Crane
  John Proctor

  Desktop Publishers: Dianne Hohnstein
  Lorna Rogers

  Illustrator: Jennifer Annesley

  Editor: Lisa McCardle

TABLE OF CONTENTS

page

INTRODUCTION 1

LEARNING THE BASICS 2

- When will my child learn to read? 2
- How important is phonics in children's reading? 3
- My daughter reads well enough but doesn't seem to understand what she reads. 4
- Why does my child have trouble with little words when he can read a number of big ones? 5
- My daughter gets b's and d's mixed up. Does this mean she has a problem? 5
- Children seem to do much more writing in school these days. 6
- Why are spelling, punctuation and grammar left uncorrected in some of my child's writing? 7
- Is spelling still taught? 9
- Do teachers still teach printing and handwriting? 10
- How do children get on with their own work if they spend a lot of time working in groups? 11
- My child's teacher says she uses "whole language". What does this mean? 12
- If my child reads a great deal will it help her in other subject areas? 13

MARKING TESTING AND REPORTING 14

- My son's teacher tells me that marks don't give a complete picture of how a student is doing. 14
- Are children still tested? 15
- How can I know if my child is reading and writing at the right level? 15
- Will my child be ready for junior high? 16

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

page

HELPING CHILDREN AT HOME 17

- I want to work with my child but I'm not sure how to go about it. 17
- How can I help my child with her reading at home? 18
- My child only wants to read one story over and over again. 19
- How should I help my child choose books to read? 20
- What can I do to help my daughter with her writing? 20
- How can I help my child improve his spelling? 21
- What are some fun things we can do with our children to help them with their school work? 22

CONCLUSION 23

READING LIST 24

INTRODUCTION

Children are learning language all the time. A great deal of their language development occurs in the home and community environment, before they start school. As parents, you are a vital part of these early experiences. Your role and interest in your child's learning does not stop there. It carries on in a wider partnership as your child begins school. Naturally, you have questions about what goes on in school and what you can do to help.

Your questions are important and this booklet is intended to address some of those related to language learning. Questions and comments were gathered from parents across the province. Broad areas of interest were then identified. From these came the following themes around which the booklet has been organized:

- Learning the Basics
- Marking, Testing and Reporting
- Helping Children at Home.

You can gain information from this booklet through a variety of approaches:

- **For Short and direct responses**, read those parts that are set in boxes or presented in bold print.
- **For further information**, read the related parts in the unboxed portion of the responses.
- **To explore further**, turn to resource materials in the reading list at the end of the booklet or contact the classroom teacher.

LEARNING THE BASICS

The ability to speak, listen, read and write confidently and competently are the basic skills that children need to develop. They are basic because they form the language learning foundation upon which most of success in school and life is built. Elementary schools aim to provide opportunities for students to **develop basic language skills** and to **use these skills** in their daily activities.

When will my child learn to read?

Reading begins long before children recognize their first word. Young children are involved in important prereading activities at home and in school. These include:

- watching people use written language to follow road signs, read recipes and make shopping lists
- recognizing labels, logos and signs for their favourite products and places to go
- listening to stories being read to them
- noticing that the pictures on the page fit the story being told
- showing an interest in the words on the story page
- recognizing words, as the same stories are read to them over and over again
- asking what words say or what certain letters are
- asking to have words or letters written down for them
- trying to copy words or letters

- pretending to read a book themselves as they turn the pages and "say" the story.

Classroom reading instruction builds upon and extends what children already know about reading. The children's school day is filled with reading opportunities.

Some time between the ages of five and seven most children:

- learn to recognize what many words say
- make useful connections between sounds and letters
- realize that words on the page fit together to make meaning
- begin to read stories and books

These are the **traditional signs of "starting to read"**. Learning to become a more competent reader continues on through the elementary school years, and beyond.

How important is phonics in children's reading?

Phonics is the process of matching letters to sounds. Children need to learn how to use phonics skills to figure out new words. However, **it is not necessary for children to be proficient in phonics skills before they can start reading. Nor is the sounding out of words the most important aspect of reading**. To benefit from the reading activity, children must be able to make sense from the words on the page.

Children learn how to use phonics through:

- talking about words and letters while reading with their parents
- reading and writing frequently on their own
- a variety of teacher planned reading and writing activities
- direct teacher instruction showing how sounds and letters match.

Using phonics clues is just one of the ways children figure out unfamiliar words. They also learn other strategies to use in identifying words.

These strategies might be:

- **recognizing by sight** words that are seen often
- **using clues** provided by such things as the length or shape of a word, the beginning letters or the meaning of a passage, to predict what the word might be
- **looking for "root words"** or **familiar word parts** (endings, rhyming parts, etc.) to assist in figuring out an unknown word
- sometimes skipping over an unknown word, continuing on reading and **using the meaning from the rest of the sentence** to help identify the unfamiliar word.

Children need to use a combination of these word recognition skills in order to become efficient readers.

My daughter reads well enough but doesn't seem to understand what she reads.

By definition, **reading includes understanding**. Children must be able to do more than just say the words they see in print.

There are a variety of reasons why children do not understand what they read. These include:

- Some children may believe that reading is simply learning to say the words on the page. **Children can become skilled at figuring out words but pay little attention to what they mean.**
- The words, sentences, or story structures in the reading material may be too hard. **When children struggle too much, they understand very little of what they've read.**
- The material may have content or vocabulary to which the children have difficulty relating. **Children need to have some background knowledge on which to build understanding.**

In their reading instruction, teachers identify comprehension problems through observing and working with the children. They can then plan appropriate instruction and learning activities.

As children try to understand what they read, they may use a number of **strategies** and **skills**. Depending on the content and purpose of their reading children may:

- keep track of what they have read so that they can **predict** or **anticipate** what will come next
- reread to **correct or confirm their understanding**
- **analyze** and **organize the ideas** that they have read
- make **inferences** and **summarize** what they have read
- know the **main idea**, and **sequence** events in order.

Strategies such as these are learned in purposeful language activities.

Why does my child have trouble with little words when he can read a number of big ones?

Children most easily remember words that are of **special importance** to them, regardless of the length or complexity of the words.

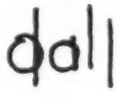
Words like *"the"*, *"there"*, *"went"* and *"where"*, don't hold much meaning in themselves. It is through continued experience with reading and writing that these become important words that connect ideas. Gradually, children do learn to recognize them by sight.

Similarly, children may correctly write long words that interest them, while misspelling many shorter words.

My daughter gets b's and d's mixed up. Does this mean she has a problem?

Initially, the direction the print goes or the order in which the letters are placed, may not seem important to young children. Their stuffed toy is recognizable, whether they grab it by the head or the leg, or put it in front of a chair or behind it. Many children naturally treat letters and words in the same way, with little concern about direction or order.

Children's writing, therefore, may include:

- letter reversals  (ball)
- mirror images (house)
- a different order of letters (stop)

This does not necessarily indicate that children have a serious problem. It is usually an **early and temporary stage** in learning to read and write. By the mid-elementary years, after much reading and writing, most children leave these reversals behind.

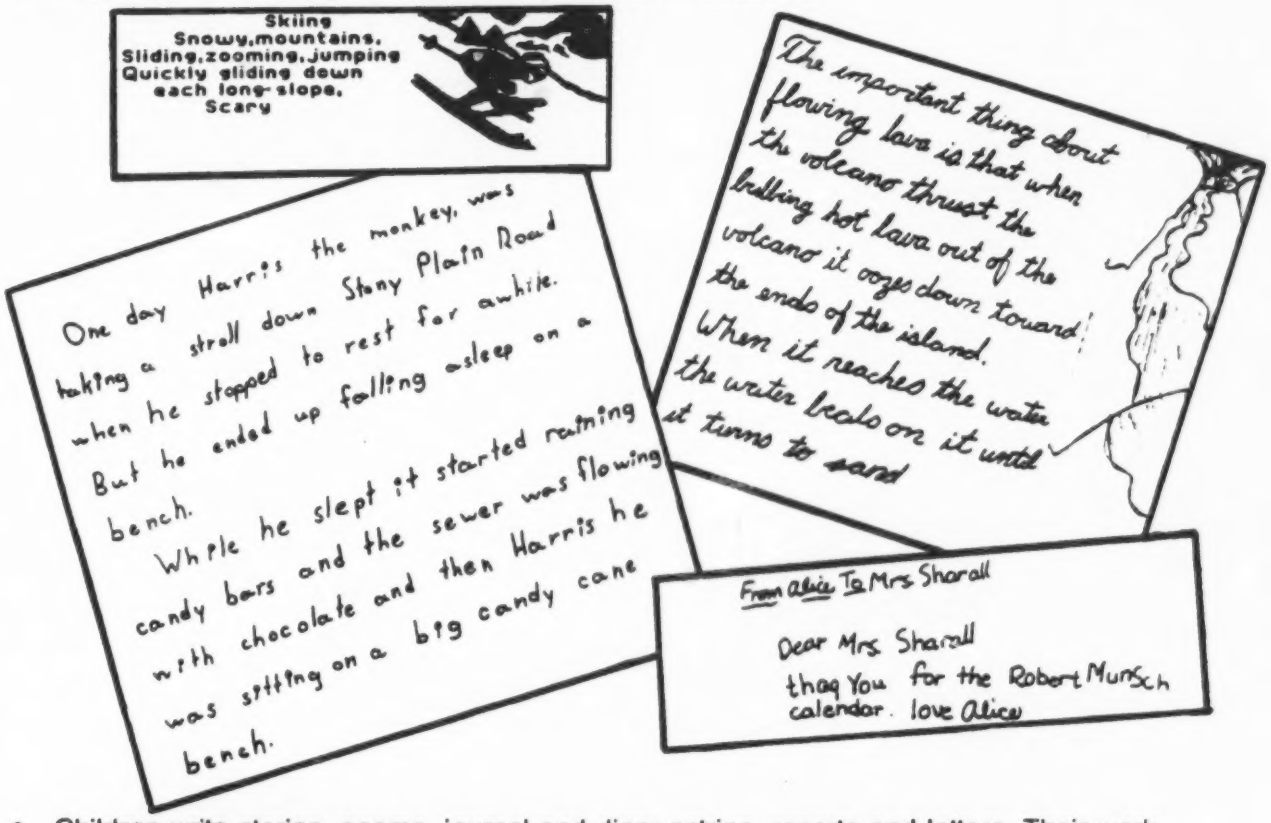
For some children, reversals may persist into the upper elementary years. Then children need direct teaching in combination with reading and writing activities to help overcome this problem.

Children seem to do much more writing in school these days.

Children at all levels in today's elementary schools write a great deal.

Through writing, children explore, practice and expand both writing and reading skills. Writing and talking are used in schools as ways of sharing ideas both in a conversational and a formal way. In many classrooms, children are authors creating something important to share.

Children write for a variety of reasons, purposes and audiences:


Skiing
Snowy, mountains,
Sliding, zooming, jumping
Quickly gliding down
each long slope,
Scary
One day Harris the monkey was taking a stroll down Stony Plain Road when he stopped to rest for awhile. But he ended up falling asleep on a bench.
While he slept it started raining candy bars and the sewer was flowing with chocolate and then Harris he was sitting on a big candy cane bench.
The important thing about flowing lava is that when the volcano thrust the boiling hot lava out of the volcano it oozes down toward the ends of the island. When it reaches the water the water boils on it until it turns to sand
From Alicia To Mrs Sharall
Dear Mrs Sharall
thaq You for the Robert Munsch calendar. love Alicia

- Children write stories, poems, journal and diary entries, reports and letters. Their work may be kept by the children themselves, displayed in the school hallways or at home, shared with classmates in various ways or sent away to people who will read it.
- Children are involved in classroom projects, such as publishing newspapers or writing plays.
- Children often keep folders that contain several pieces of writing in various stages of development.

Children enjoy activities such as these because they are learning and using language in meaningful situations. Children's language develops as they write with support and instructional feedback from adults and their classmates.

Why are spelling, punctuation and grammar left uncorrected in some of my child's writing?

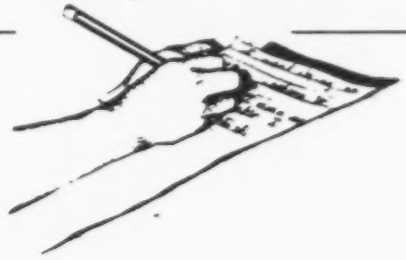
There are reasons why errors in children's work may be left uncorrected.

- **The developmental level of the child.**

  Sometimes errors are left uncorrected, because the writing, as it stands, represents the child's best work at his/her individual level of development. The writing is worthy of praise regardless of conventional errors.

- **The purpose of the activity and the intended learning.**

  Children are involved in many kinds of writing activities. Teachers make different types of corrections, depending on the purpose of the activity and what the student is to learn from it.



Developmental Level of the Child

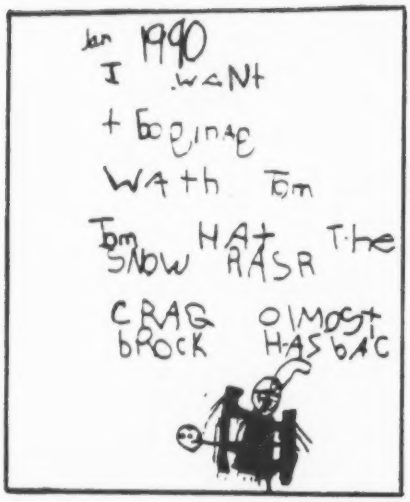
Through reading and writing experiences children discover that writing is more than marks on a page. They see that it has meaning for themselves and other people. Children gradually become aware that using conventional spelling, punctuation and grammar helps to make their writing easier for others to understand.

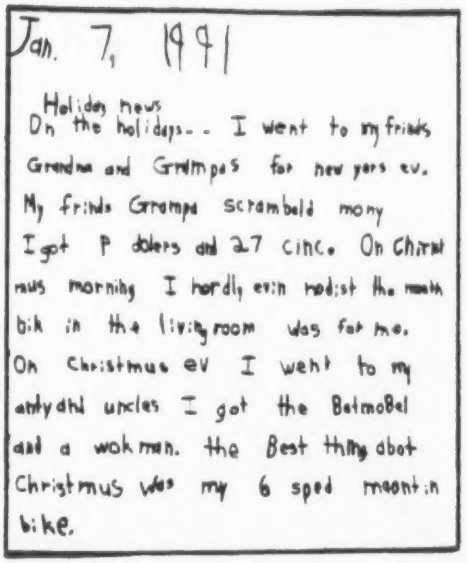
However, conventional spelling, punctuation and grammar cannot be learned all at one time.

- **In the early stages of development in their writing, children express their ideas in the best way they can.** They may be discouraged by too many corrections to their work. Children are then likely to become stilted in their writing attempts. They think they can't "do it right", so they often become afraid to try. This is true of younger children as well as older elementary students who are in the early developmental stages of writing.

- If children are given **encouragement and assistance** they are more willing to continue writing. They become more competent in expressing their ideas in written form and learn more about spelling, punctuation and grammar. **Much growth and development can be seen in children's writing over time.**

On the following page are samples that show the growth in one child's writing over a period of one year.




Jan. 7, 1991
Holiday news
On the holidays.. I went to my frinds
Grandma and Grampas for new years ev.
My frinds Grampa scrambald mony
I got P dolers and 27 cinc. On Chirst
mus morning I hardly evin redist the mesh
bik in the livig room was for me.
On Christmus ev I went to my
anty and uncles I got the Batmobel
and a wok man. the Best thing about
Christmus was my 6 sped mountin
bike.

Purpose of the Activity and Intended Learning

- **Sometimes the children's writing is personal, and not meant to be marked or corrected.**

  Children's diary entries for example, should be accepted as expressions of personal thoughts, feelings and experiences.

- **Sometimes children are being encouraged simply to let their ideas flow.**

  Children can express their ideas more freely when initial concern with spelling, punctuation, grammar and handwriting is minimal. Thus, the suggestions or corrections made would be ones to help children clarify meaning or expand ideas.

- **Sometimes there are certain skills to be learned by the children.**

  Teachers may therefore choose to relate most of the corrections to the learning of that particular skill (for example: the use of capital letters for sentence beginnings).

- **Sometimes a piece of writing is a draft which children will later revise and edit.**

  Children can meet with each other and with their teachers to discuss their writing. These conferences provide children with coaching and feedback to help them refine their writing.

- **Sometimes errors are left uncorrected by teachers to allow students the opportunity to edit their own work and make corrections.**

  Recognizing their own errors and correcting them is a most important skill for children to develop.

As children continue to read and write, they make fewer errors because they gain more control over the conventions of written language.

Is spelling still taught?

Yes, children are still taught to spell in school. Children learn spelling in a variety of ways:

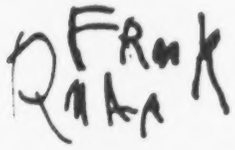
- through a whole range of **interesting reading and writing activities**
- weekly spelling lists developed by the children's teachers, based on **words used in classroom activities**
- individual spelling instruction built around **words used in the children's personal writings**
- use of spelling **textbooks**
- a **combination** of these.

Research and experience has shown that:

- Children learn to spell by **trying to spell words that are important and necessary** to them as readers and writers.
- Children can be taught a wide range of **strategies to use** in trying to spell words correctly.
- Spelling is reinforced most effectively through **meaningful reading and writing activities** rather than by drill.

Growth in Spelling Abilities

As children begin to write, parents will probably see spelling attempts that look like this:

- 

  Usually, between ages 4 to 6 years, children begin experimenting with written language by **writing letters they know**, often intending to make a word.

- we rescud the printses.

  Between about the ages of 5 to 8 years, they try to **write words the way they hear them**.

- Our class is makeing a winter mural. I can't wate untill it's done.

  Generally, from ages 7 to 10 years, children begin to **apply some spelling rules and conventions**, although there are still times when the words are not correct.

Children's attempts to represent words have been called **temporary** or **invented** spelling. They do not take the place of conventional spelling. However, children's experiments with spelling play a key part in their learning about written language. These invented spellings also provide valuable information for teachers as they plan lessons and activities that will help children become competent spellers.

Usually, between the ages of 9 to 15 years, children move to more conventional spelling.

Through frequent reading and writing activities, children add to their store of words. They build up a repertoire of spelling patterns and rules which they can apply in spelling new words. Children develop a sense of when a word looks right. When a word looks wrong, they can often apply the strategies they have learned to correct it, or they can turn to a dictionary.

Learning spelling skills is an ongoing process. Teachers assist children through **direct instruction** and by providing **extensive reading and writing experiences.**

Do teachers still teach printing and handwriting?

Children do receive instruction in both printing and handwriting.

In Alberta schools, children first learn to print (manuscript writing). Then, usually, some time between the ages of 7 and 10, they are introduced to handwriting (cursive writing).

In both printing and handwriting, children need to develop a style that is legible, clear, and easy to produce. Printing and handwriting are developmental skills children learn through:

- **direct instruction**
- following **good models**
- having **purposeful situations** in which they can practise and produce their best printed or written work.

As well as printing and handwriting, many children in elementary schools today may be learning **keyboarding skills**. Students are often given opportunities to use computers in some of their writing activities. The use of typed presentations can be helpful to those children who experience difficulty with penmanship skills. Children can also use computers to add a "professional touch" to their written pieces.

Snowman
Snowy and cold,
Rolling,stacking,packing.
Standing still in the
freezing cold,
Frosty.

How do children get on with their own work if they spend a lot of time working in groups?

Children are involved in different kinds of work time:

- Sometimes their work is a quiet **reflective activity**. Then children need quiet time to work alone and be involved in their own personal thoughts, experiences and expressions.
- At other times children need **opportunities for interacting** – to talk, share and test out their ideas. During these times they are learning **from** each other and **with** each other.

The cooperative group activities are just as much the children's "own work" as the individual activities.

Classrooms can be set up in various ways to provide children with opportunities to work and learn on their own and with others.

- Children's desks or tables may be set up in flexible arrangements. They can then be easily moved to accommodate different types of whole class, group or individual activities.
- Teachers may set up carefully planned learning centres or stations. The various activities may focus on a subject area or a theme. By rotating through these centres or stations, children are actively involved in learning on their own or with others.

- Classroom libraries, cozy corners and quiet spots are often set up as areas where children learn on their own, in pairs or in groups.

My child's teacher says she uses "whole language". What does this mean?

"Whole language" is a term that may be interpreted in different ways. Usually it refers to a set of beliefs or ideas about how children learn to read and write in ways that are natural and enjoyable. In general, "whole language" teaching and learning is based on beliefs that children are capable language learners and that they develop and practise language skills most effectively through:

- **using language** to express themselves and to gain an understanding of what is going on around them
- learning language as a way of **communicating meaning and ideas**, rather than as a collection of separate components (letters, sounds, syllables, etc.)
- **experiencing success** and being provided with new learning opportunities that are **building on what they already know and can do**
- **seeing a purpose for language skills** they are learning
- **reading books or writing on their own** as soon as they are interested. Children learn to read, write and spell while they are trying to do these things.

The above ideas are central to "whole language" although certainly not unique to it. "Whole language" is one way of looking at how children learn language.

Teachers select approaches that are best for each child and incorporate into their teaching a variety of ways to help students become competent readers and writers. These include:

- providing students with regular daily **opportunities to read and write** materials at their own level
- planning learning activities in response to children's developing **needs**, **abilities** and **experiences**
- teaching and providing practice for skills such as spelling, phonics and punctuation through **meaningful reading and writing activities related to the required curriculum,** rather than as a set series of isolated lessons and drill exercises
- using interesting reading materials to teach students a variety of **strategies for understanding** what they read
- providing **teacher directed lessons** whenever children need specific information or teaching to help them learn. This language instruction may be given to groups or to individuals
- helping students **connect related reading and writing skills.**

Teachers will be using a number of different methods. No single teaching approach is right for all children. Effective teaching matches the teaching approach and materials to the particular students and circumstances.

If my child reads a great deal will it help her in other subject areas?

Frequent reading both in and out of school **is critical** to children's success in all subject areas.

When children read broadly and often, they develop a **base** that is necessary for future learning because they:

- Experience **new vocabulary** and **sentence structures**.
- Search out **answers** to questions, **solve problems** and gain **information**.
- Develop valuable **thinking skills** as they work to get meaning from their reading.

All of these are essential for success in school.

MARKING, TESTING AND REPORTING

When teachers evaluate children's language, they look at a number of aspects of the learning that has taken place. Attention is given to **progress** made in their language development and to **what the children are now able to do**. It is also of value to observe the **processes they use** in developing language skills or working through an activity.

My son's teacher tells me that marks don't give a complete picture of how a student is doing.

Your son's teacher is making a very good point. Marks tend to provide a very narrow picture of what your child can really do.

To tell you more about your child's progress, present reporting systems may include:

- checklists of skills
- portfolios of children's work, with accompanying evaluative comments
- letter or numeral grades and percentages
- comments
- parent–teacher or student–parent–teacher conferences
- a combination of the above.

A good way for parents to gain information from the various reporting systems is to keep in mind the following questions:

- What is my child **presently learning** in language?
- How is my child **putting this learning into daily use**?
- What **progress** has my child made in development of language skills?
- What **stages of development** has my child reached in the different language skills?

If some aspects of a child's progress are unclear, parents may wish to make a call or visit to the teacher.

Are children still tested?

Yes. There may be times when tests are used as helpful instructional tools. Test results can provide teachers with some information about how children are doing in their language learning. This information can be used in assigning marks, but even more important, in providing **guidance for planning instruction and activities** that will help children progress in their language learning.

Testing is just one of many ways of tracking and evaluating student progress. Other ways include:

- **teacher observations and notes** on the students' learning and activities
- **anecdotal records or checklists**
- student–teacher writing and reading **conferences**
- **tapes** of the children's oral reading recorded at various times
- students' record keeping in their own **logbooks**
- **students' evaluation** of their own work.

Most teachers use a combination of these ways in order to gain a complete picture of what students can do.

How can I know if my child is reading and writing at the right level?

When parents talk about the "right level" they are probably referring to their child's progress in relation to other children in the same year of school. This information is often included on **report cards**. Talking to the **classroom teacher** can provide parents with a further understanding of their child's comparative performance.

Children learn at individual and varying rates. Some children show remarkable growth over a relatively short period of time, while others take longer to reach the same language level. Thus, in any classroom there will be children performing at many different levels. Teachers recognize comparative differences in children's language development and plan accordingly.

Regardless of what level they are working at, or how quickly they learn, children need to:

- **experience success** in what they are learning
- **meet with challenges** that move them on to learning something new
- **be recognized** for their efforts and their progress. Children's self-esteem and their ability to learn are enhanced by their own sense of accomplishment and by others having a positive regard for their achievements.

The question of children being "held back" if they are not working at the same level as most of their classmates is sometimes asked by parents. Usually it is in the children's best interests to stay with their peers, but be involved in learning at their own level. However, individual consideration needs to be given to each child.

Will my child be ready for junior high?

The elementary language learning curriculum sets out the developmental language path that most students are expected to follow. Through carefully planned instruction and activities, elementary teachers provide opportunities for students to grow in their language development. **For most children this will prepare them to meet the challenges of junior high.**

Throughout school, students progress at different rates and are working at different levels. By the end of the Grade 6 year, some children may still be developing earlier language skills while others may be performing at or beyond junior high levels.

For those children who still have a number of early language skills to develop, junior high learning may be difficult. They will need teaching and activities that will develop these early skills. Whether that occurs in an elementary or a junior high school, will depend on many factors. Parents, teachers and, probably, the child should meet together to consider what is best for the student.

HELPING CHILDREN AT HOME

When parents spend time with their children it is an opportunity to learn with and from each other.

Much learning happens quite **naturally** within the home environment. Families talk about things, go places and do things together, play games, make plans for trips and deal with home situations. There are also language activities for parent and child that are **directly associated with school work.**

Encouragement and support from parents and other family members is important in children's language learning. Most parents recognize this and are anxious to do whatever they can to help.

I want to work with my child but I'm not sure how to go about it.

> Language learning includes experiences in speaking and listening, writing and reading. Whatever the activity, the most important thing is that the parents and children **enjoy learning together.**

Many parents set aside special language learning times. You can make these times more productive and enjoyable if you:

- let your child choose a quiet place that is away from family activity
- set aside a specified time to work with your child on language activities
- listen attentively and show enthusiasm
- ask questions that show you are interested, not to "test" your child
- provide encouragement
- focus on the improvements and commendable efforts
- let your child explain his or her ideas or understanding of things to you
- avoid becoming annoyed over repeated mistakes
- do something else if things become tense.

You can get more specific tips about working with your own child by talking with the classroom teacher.

How can I help my child with her reading at home?

Children need **many and varied opportunities to explore, read and enjoy books**. The more experiences children have in reading, the more they gain in fluency and competence. Parents can play a large part in providing these experiences.

The single, most important thing parents can do is to **read to their children**, regardless of age.

Children of **all ages** need to listen to stories for sheer enjoyment and to become aware of a variety of types of good literature. Children need to hear patterns of language in a wide variety of poems and stories. They need to be provided with reading models by having someone read to them.

Parents also need to **read with their children**. Again, this is an important experience for children of **all ages**.

As parents of very young children, you can:

- let your child choose the book for you to read aloud
- discuss the book and its pictures with your child as you go through it together
- encourage your child when he or she echoes some of the words as they're read
- pause at particular points and let your child predict what will happen next
- point to the words and invite your child to join you on lines that are repeated over and over again in the story
- encourage your child to "read" or retell the story or parts of it, if he or she shows an interest in doing this.

As your children become readers, you can read with them in other ways:

- You can encourage your child to read aloud to you or to someone else in the home. An enthusiastic and supportive listener can help your child improve in fluency and reading comprehension.

- You can provide further help with fluency and comprehension by spending about 15 minutes, four or five times a week reading with your child in this way:
  - let your child choose the material to be read
  - sit side by side with your child and read aloud in **unison.** This requires practice on the part of parents. You must be able to match your reading speed and the volume of your voice with those of your child
  - allow your child to read alone when he or she feels ready (a prearranged signal is a good idea)
  - if your child has difficulty, join in and continue reading together until your child signals that he or she is ready to read alone once more.

This technique is also useful when children wish to read books that are too difficult for them to read on their own.

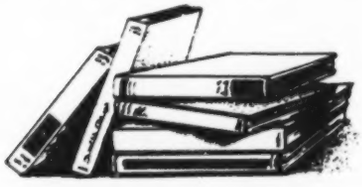
Two other important things parents can do is to:

- provide time and encouragement for their children to **read on their own**
- let their children **see family members enjoying reading** activities.

When children realize that reading is important and that spending time with books is a valuable and pleasurable activity, they develop a reading habit that will contribute to success in school and in life.

My child only wants to read one story over and over again.

Frequently, young children have favourite books they come back to continually. They become familiar with the book and enter right into the story. They gain confidence with the words, pictures and patterns in the book.



Older students often want to read books on one topic, or read all of the books in a story series, or books by the same author. In doing this, children become very knowledgeable in their area of interest. With series books, they come to identify with the characters and become real experts on the content of the series.

All of this is a **natural part of children's growth** as readers. It is important to let children explore their areas of interest. Avoid pushing them into reading books of your choice.

At some point, most children will decide they have spent enough time on one book or topic and want to move on to something else. Then parents can make suggestions of other books to read.

How should I help my child choose books to read?

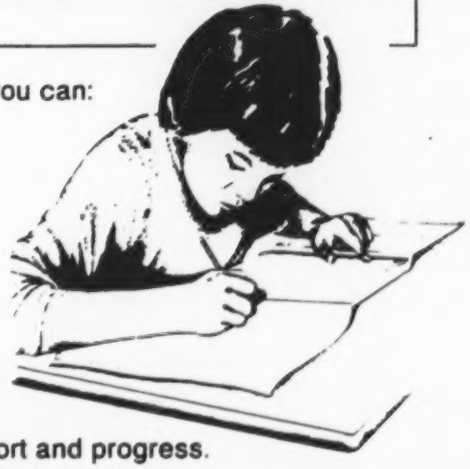
Children need to learn to **choose good books for themselves.** Parents can provide their children with frequent opportunities to look through books and choose ones that seem interesting and that can be read without too much difficulty. When children choose a book and read it for themselves, they have probably chosen the "right" book at the "right" level.

To help your child in choosing books, you can:

- talk to your child about what kinds of books he or she wants to read
- browse through libraries and bookstores with your child
- get assistance from public librarians, the school library personnel and your child's teacher
- refer to lists of books that children of different ages choose to read (books containing such information are listed at the end of this booklet).

What can I do to help my daughter with her writing?

There are many opportunities for children to write at home. These writing activities do not necessarily need to be connected with school assignments. The parents' major role is one of **encouraging children to write** and **showing an interest** in what they have written.



To keep up your child's enthusiasm and desire to write, you can:

- Talk to your child about the ideas he or she wants to express in writing.
- Let your child see you writing.
- Look for opportunities for your child to write in a variety of situations other than just school assignments (for example, write notes to your child and invite replies, fill out registration forms and write invitations together).
- Be positive about the writing; applaud your child's effort and progress.
- Look for and respond to the ideas presented in the writing, rather than errors.
- Provide a suitable spot and the needed materials for writing.
- Have a folder or special display area for some of your child's writing.
- Collect your child's "home" writing over time and share those pieces (like pictures) at special times.

How can I help my child improve his spelling?

There are a number of valuable ways parents can help children develop their spelling abilities. Some of these ways are:

- **Encourage your child to read frequently.**

  As children read books, magazines, advertisements, greeting cards, newspapers, T.V. guides, instructions, and even comics, they become increasingly aware of what words mean and how they are spelled.

- **Find ways for your child to write for a real purpose.**

  When children write letters to friends, make posters and shopping lists, or write messages, much learning occurs. As they try to spell the words they need, children use what they know about the sounds and combinations of letters, and they try to remember how words look.

- **Be supportive of your child's spelling attempts.**

  At first children do not spell every word they write correctly. They learn much about spelling while they develop as readers and writers—but this takes time and practice.

- **Play word games with your child**

  Through word games children see and hear many new words.

- **Play memory games with your child**

  To be effective spellers, children need to be able to remember how words look. Memory games help to develop their ability to recall and visualize.

- **Talk with your child**

  It is hard for children to spell words they have not heard or do not understand. Children learn new words by hearing and using them.

Although becoming a competent speller involves more than memorizing a list of words, there may be times when children need to learn a particular selection of words. If you are helping your child with a given list of words, the following points can be useful:

- Let your child decide which words need to be learned first.
- Work on only a few words at a time.
- Display the list of words on the fridge or bulletin board.

- Continually narrow down the list so that you can concentrate on the words that seem to cause difficulty.
- Let your child group the words for study. Such groupings as easy/hard, long/short, ones with similar word parts, and words with added beginnings or endings might be used.
- Let your child circle the "tricky" parts and figure out ways to remember the correct spelling.
- Have your child write down the spelling word you give and have him or her decide whether or not it has been spelled correctly. Then check it together.
- Give your child plenty of purposeful opportunities to use the words in conversation and in writing.

What are some fun things we can do with our children to help them with their school work?

There are a lots of family activities that are fun and help children learn language.

- Play word and memory games such as Scrabble, Spill 'n Spell, word lotto, Monopoly, crossword puzzles, Concentration and other card games.
- Set aside a particular time when the whole family reads. Sometimes this could be coordinated with a family trip to the library.
- Put together a family video, slide show or photo album with written or oral comments or captions.

- Find ways for your child to use writing for real purposes such as letters to friends, pen pals and relatives, sending for free or informational materials, taking messages and making cards, signs, labels or posters.
- Plan trips together and read books, travel brochures, maps, accommodation directories, etc., in order to gather information.

These are examples of valuable family learning experiences. Most families regard activities such as these as a natural part of their times together. Certainly, learning together can be fun for parents and the children.

CONCLUSION

The responses to parents' questions in this booklet are built on some very important language learning principles. These principles are listed below, along with an example or further explanation.

- **Children develop language skills as they make meaning from things they experience, and as they communicate that meaning to others.**

  At a very young age, a child may point to the moon and say "ball" because that is the round object with which he is familiar. Think of all the language the child learns from that early time to several years later when he presents an oral report to his class about the moon.

- **Language is learned when children use it in real and important ways.**

  For example, if children at a school aren't happy with their playground they could decide to write a letter to the local Parks and Recreation Department requesting the upgrading of their playground.

- **Language skills means that children do more than simply "learn the skills". Children must apply and extend these skills in their learning throughout the day.**

  Children may be able to underline the vowel sounds in a list of words on a work sheet. However, it is not until they use their knowledge of vowel sounds in figuring out words in their daily reading and writing that the skill becomes helpful.

- **Language learning follows a developmental path. Children of the same age may be at different stages in their language learning, just as they are in their physical growth.**

  Consider two children of a similar age reading the same story. The way they read and understand it will probably be different. What they already know and can do, will have more effect than their age on their understanding of the story .

- **Children develop language skills more readily when the learning activities seem connected to a meaningful use of language.**

  At first, children may not see the need for punctuation and correct spelling. Through reading and writing they begin to realize how a comma, period, or a correctly spelled word, helps in understanding what has been written.

- **Language develops through use.**

  New skills are often not achieved perfectly on the first attempt—maybe not even on the tenth. Children learn and retain their language skills through practise and encouragement in a variety of situations at home and at school.

It is hoped that this booklet has given you, as parents, an understanding of children's language learning and has encouraged you to be ongoing helpers in their language development.

READING LIST

Early Language Learning At Home:

Creating Readers and Writers. Susan Mandel Glazer. International Reading Association, 1990.

Home: Where Reading and Writing Begin. May Hill. Scholastic TAB Publications, 1989.

Learning with Zachary. Lester L. Laminack. Scholastic TAB Publications, 1991.

Let me Play. Elizabeth A. Munroe. Scholastic Canada Ltd., 1991.

Reading Begins at Home. Dorothy Butler and Marie Clay. Irwin Publishing, 1979 (a Heinemann book).

Reading Matters and *Talk Your Way to Reading.* Brian Cutting. Ginn Publishing Canada, 1982 (two books from Shortland Publications, New Zealand).

Writing Begins at Home. Marie Clay. Irwin Publishing, 1987 (a Heinemann book).

Understanding Aspects of Language Learning:

Spel . . . is a Four Letter Word. Richard Gentry. Scholastic TAB Publications, 1987.

What's Whole in Whole Language? Kenneth Goodman, Scholastic TAB Publications. 1986.

Choosing books with your child:

Comics to Classics: A Parent's Guide to Books for Teens and Preteens. Arthea J.S. Reed. International Reading Association, 1988.

Family Storybook Reading. Denny Taylor and Dorothy Strickland. Scholastic TAB Publications, 1986 (a Heinemann book).

The New Read Aloud Handbook. Jim Trelease. Penguin Books, 1989.

Reading Together. Barbara Taylor and Dianne Monson. Gage/Scott Foresman, 1991.

Note:
- Some of these books will be available at bookstores. Others may need to be ordered through the school librarian.
- The International Reading Association has a wide variety of publications of interest to parents. For more information, or to obtain a catalogue, write to:

International Reading Association
800 Barksdale Road
P.O. Box 8139
Newark
Delaware. 19714-8139
U.S.A.